

Transit tax backers file lawsuit to get measure on ballot

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Hours after being disqualified from the November ballot Monday, supporters of a statewide transportation measure said they will file suit to get back on.

Backers of Proposition 203, the TIME initiative, have been examining petitions for several days in anticipation that Secretary of State Jan Brewer would deem the measure short of the 153,365 signatures needed to qualify.

Nearly half of the 260,698 signatures submitted by last month's deadline were tossed out.

"I am very surprised that a ballot measure ended up with over 42 percent of its signatures being invalid," Brewer said in a statement Monday.

The initiative, championed by Gov. Janet Napolitano and business and economic development groups, would ask voters to hike state sales taxes from 5.6 cents on every dollar spent to 6.6 cents to finance \$42.6 billion worth of freeways, trains, buses and other transportation needs over the next 30 years.

Between Brewer's office and a random sample of 5 percent of signatures from each county recorder's office, 122,247 signatures were wiped out.

Attorney Charles Blanchard said TIME coalition supporters have identified about 10,000 signatures disqualified by Brewer's office that he will challenge in court. Examples include petition sheets that were thrown out because the county name wasn't filled in.

Blanchard also contends Maricopa County, where most of names were rejected, failed to count the signatures of some people who have moved but were registered to vote at another address.

Maricopa County elections director Karen Osborne said she has done no such thing.

Blanchard doesn't need to convince a judge there are 153,365 valid names on the petitions. If he can show the figure, based on that random sample, would reach 95 percent of that, the measure would be placed before voters because there is not sufficient time for each county to check signatures.